



# The Child Care Needs of Native' American Children

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

*As communities rich in tradition, and with a firm belief in the resiliency and strength of families, tribal nations emphasize the importance of nurturing children's growth and development in ways that build pride in their heritage.*

*Juan Lombardi, Associate Commissioner  
Child Care Bureau, USDHHS*

### INTRODUCTION

A combination of federal and state-funded subsidized child care and development programs serve thousands of diverse families in California. Some of the approximately 80,000 Native American children in the state are among those served. California is home to nearly 12 percent of the nation's total Native American population. Eighty-one percent of these Native Americans live in urban areas and 19 percent live in rural areas or on trust land in California. Throughout California there are 104 trust lands, also called rancherias or reservations, which is land held by the federal government in "trust." In addition, there are nearly 120 federally recognized tribal government entities.

For child care and development programs, the federal government provides money directly from the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to tribal governments to assist families in paying for early childhood education as well as after school care. The federal government guarantees 1-2 percent of the total CCDBG to Native American families in need. Donna Shalala, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, requested the full 2 percent of the CCDBG to be allocated for Native American children. This means \$59 million has been given directly to the Native American population by the federal government nationwide to operate child care and development programs.

Native American tribes in California receive \$1,696,704 from the federal government for child care. The funding is used to serve approximately 957 eligible children. However, this falls short of serving the nearly 16,280 California Native American children that are estimated to be eligible for subsidized child care based on income and age criteria.

### KEY ISSUES SURROUNDING NATIVE AMERICAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

#### Communication and Outreach:

**From Federal and State Agencies:** A major concern of advocates for Native American children and families is the extent of communication between tribal governments and the federal and state governments. Currently, the federal government is maintaining communication with tribal governments. It is important that the 'California state government ensures that this government-to-government relationship remains intact, especially as states face the challenges of implementing welfare reform. This includes, for instance, seeking and ensuring representation of tribal communities on state task forces or working groups that discuss changes, modifications and improvements to the child care delivery system.

**Among early childhood educators:** Both private and state funded child care providers must work with the tribal people to ensure that programs aimed at children are culturally modified to suit the educational and cultural needs of Native American children. Leaders within the tribal communities are willing to help child care providers design programs that are beneficial to the tribal children and that teach every child about Native American heritage and culture.

*Early intervention services for young children and their families should reflect cultural differences, be based on the needs of the family and local community, and show respect for the families.*

*Debra Skinner,  
Researcher and Cultural Anthropologist*

**With state funded programs:** Many agencies with contracts from Department of Education are funded to serve children and families living on rancherias as well as the general public. However, geographic and cultural disparities have resulted in a lower level of service to Native Americans communities. There is need for outreach to tribes by state-contracted child care agencies to ensure equal access to programs, including State Preschool, Alternative Payment Programs; resource and referral services, and so forth.

*The state government and state agencies need to maintain communication between themselves and tribal governments.*

## LEGISLATIVE AND COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT

Access to resource and referral services is especially important to Native Americans. Many Native American parents are unaware of their child care options. Resource and referral programs often serve as a link to Alternative Payment Programs, which provide certificates or vouchers to parents for subsidized child care. Also, resource and referral programs provide an important link to recruitment and training for new or established child care providers. Access to such training and recruitment programs allow Native Americans to maintain child care facilities within their own communities.

### FUNDING

**Allocation:** Each tribe in California and likewise the United States must apply for money from the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Previously, all money allocated had to be spent within two years from the time it was granted. Unspent funds were then reabsorbed into the federal treasury. Some tribes in California are not using all the money they receive. Other tribes run out of funds due to an increase in the number of families requesting help.

***More money is needed to better run the current child care facilities and build and stuff new ones,***

Currently, a new provision allows for tribes to use other tribes' surplus money. The unused funds are now available to other tribes through a reallocation procedure. As a result, the Federal government is developing broad guidelines for spending along with technical assistance programs that will help the tribes spend and monitor their money more efficiently.

***While there are some small, in-home child care centers located on rancherias there are few, if any; c a r e c e n t e r s .***

**Head Start:** Along with State Preschools, Head Start is an important source of child development for the Native American population. Head Start provides education and nutrition to preschool-age children while their parents work. Currently there are more than 5,000 California Native American children eligible for Head Start services. However, Head Start is only serving 460 of these children. Since California tribes account for 22 percent of all federally recognized tribes, tribal governments believe they should be getting 22 percent of Head Start funds rather than the 5 percent they currently receive.

While some tribal families use Head Start, there are many that do not have access to a center. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services only grants money for Head Start facilities when there are twenty or more children that will be using the center. However, in California the number of children in the small tribal communities who need Head Start is often fewer than twenty. One option would be to bring a group of children from

neighboring communities into one Head Start program. Another is to operate a system of family child care homes administered by a Head Start grantee.

### MAJOR BARRIERS

- **Lack of communication between tribal governments and Federal and State governments.**
- **Lack of incorporating culture and heritage into school curriculum and teacher training,**
- **Lack of representation by Native Americans on local child care planning councils.**
- **Limited outreach from state funded programs to tribes.**
- **Funding for Head Start programs on reservations is not available because of too few children.**

### IDENTIFIED STRATEGIES

Despite the many concerns regarding the quality and amount of education for Native American children, many organizations around the nation are currently working with state governments and tribal communities to increase access to child care information and to strengthen the current child care systems in tribal communities. For example:

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) is providing new funding for training in health and safety in child care.

Groups such as First Nations use e-mail to communicate with child care grantees and federal partners.

In addition to the new allotment of the CCDBG (\$59 million), the Secretary of Health and Human Services is required by law to develop minimum child care standards that deal with tribal needs and resources in concurrence with tribal governments and organizations.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services is also given the authority to allow tribes to use program funds for construction of new facilities as long as the level of education in current child care centers does not fall below what it was prior to construction.

While funding is scarce, the California Indian Manpower Consortium, which provides services for a number of California tribes, has created a resource library containing information that includes local resource and referral information and training guides for child care workers.

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